DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 750 SP 040 902

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TITLE Intensification and Beyond: Bringing Professional Development Back in the Picture.
PUB DATE 2002-04-00
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 1-5, 2002).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Coping; Elementary Education; *Faculty Development; Foreign Countries; *Stress Variables; Teacher Collaboration; *Teaching Conditions
IDENTIFIERS Belgium

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on teaching conditions, stress variables, and demands placed upon teachers, focusing on the situation in Belgium. Researchers examined whether and how teachers in Flemish elementary schools experienced intense, stressful, and negative working conditions, focusing on which forms of stressors and negative conditions existed, the impact of growing demands and expectations upon teachers, mediating elements in this process, and characteristics of the school organization as a mediator. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with a principal, a part-time teacher, and three classroom teachers, and from staff room conversations and informal chats with school team members. Results indicated that hard working team members stimulated each other to respond to the new demands. This happened without any structuring by the principal. Teachers evaluated the advantages to students when determining whether or not an external demand was valuable. Although respondents coped in different ways, they had one issue in common: all teachers wanted to balance their professional and personal lives without doing any harm to the students. (Contains 53 references.) (SM)

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Intensification and beyond:

Bringing professional development back in the picture

Paper for the symposium "Teacher development in times of intensification. Deepening our understanding."

presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans, April 2002

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29 / 03 / 2002

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Introduction

In almost the entire western world, social, economic, political and technological changes are taking place. These processes of change are also recognized in the educational world. A lot of these changes seem to lead to new and additional expectations towards schools and teachers, for example attention to children with special needs, the application of information and communication technology, solving social problems (like drug abuse and coping with problematic educational situations). On the one hand schools get more autonomy to develop their own way of tackling these (new) challenges. They can even apply for additional financial and professional support. But on the other hand the central government exerts pervasive control through permanent evaluation by the inspectorate and demands for accountability.

Looking at the Flemish (Belgian) situation, 're-valuing' of the teacher's profession is one of the central issues in the actual policy discourse on education. Educational policymakers just can't ignore teachers' complaints about workload, pressure, lack of resources, lack of appraisal, ... Even more difficult to ignore is the increasing shortage of teachers. Let's illustrate it: teachers experience an immense extension of their assigned job duties. This extension is not directly related to teaching itself, but encompasses mainly administrative and organisational tasks. Additionally, teachers are forced to constantly look for new teaching methods and contents in order to keep students motivated. ICT is often thought of as a very powerful and promising answer. At the same time, teachers experience being more controlled then ever (not only by the principal, or educational policy but also by the parents and the local community) and they continuously have to account for their actions. This increasing workload is accompanied by a lack of resources to successfully accomplish this multitude of tasks. These resources concern pedagogical resources as well as organisational working conditions.

These changes in teachers' work are not only taking place in Flanders but can be observed in many western countries and are reflected in a growing search literature (Helsby, 1999; Troman & Woods, 2001; Smylie, 1999). Even this short overview of 'observations', leads us to conclude that teachers' work is experiencing deep changes: they have to cope with an increasing number of tasks, without sufficient resources to properly cope with this demands, expectations and pressures. In this paper we want to deepen our understanding of the current processes and more specifically, what they actually mean to teachers' thinking and practice. A relevant theoretical perspective, coming from labour theories, is the 'intensification thesis' (Apple, 1986), which stresses the negative and inhibiting impact of external demands and expectations on teachers. This thesis is already empirically tested and refined by researchers in the USA, England, Tasmania (Australia) and Canada. Wondering whether the intensification thesis has sufficient explanatory power to understand the developments in Flanders, we start with an overview of the conceptual discussion and the (partly empirically based) modification of the intensification thesis. In order to provide a deep understanding of the meaning of the processes taking place in teachers' professional lives, we will argue that this thesis can be refined by

using the idea of teachers' professional development as a lifelong, contextualised interaction process between the individual teacher and the context.

1 The 'original' intensification thesis

Using Larson's (1980) labour theory, the American author Michael Apple delivered one of the most important theoretical contributions to the understanding of the profound changes in teachers' work.

1.1 Social changes and work pressure

In the public sector as well as the private sector in the modern post-fordist capitalistic society, the increasing tendency towards efficacy and effectiveness induces an intensification of labour (Apple, 1986). Teaching must be thought of as a labour process; this labour is degrading because of the current tendencies (Apple & Jungck, 1996, p.21): more and more, education has to be tuned to economic needs and its goals are increasingly thought of in economic terms. Furthermore, the changes in society have a significant impact on education and teachers: control over teachers increases while at the same time their autonomy declines. This, however, goes hand in hand with other 'slogans': "Teacher development, co-operation and 'empowerment' may be the talk, but centralization, standardization and rationalization may be the strongest tendencies." (Apple & Jungck, 1996, p. 20). The school is expected to solve social and economic problems, such as the shortage in the labour market. This all means an immense pressure on teachers' work as well as on the general educational thinking. Therefore, Apple argues that the intensification thesis offers an interesting theoretical perspective to interpret the current changes in education.

Although teachers can formally participate in curriculum planning and implementation, the reality is one of growing dependency on externally pre-specified sequential lists of behaviourally defined competencies and objectives. These lists are externally imposed; in this way teachers' professional control over goals and contents of education is increasingly being denied. As a consequence, "instead of professional teachers who care greatly about what they do and why they do it, we may have alienated executors of someone else's plans." (Apple & Jungck, 1996, p.24). Consequently, pre-packaged and pre-designed materials and texts are 'offered' to teachers. Additionally, a growing number of evaluation- and accountability systems is imposed. Furthermore, new contents are added to the curriculum, while hardly anything is being removed. Parallel to this, the amount of paperwork for teachers grows fast.

The central characteristic of intensification is formulated by Hargreaves: "Teachers have to respond to greater pressures and to comply with growing innovations under conditions that are at best stable and at worst deteriorating" (Hargreaves, 1992, p.88). In line with Apple & Jungck (1996) and Hargreaves (1992), we provide a more detailed list of characteristics of intensification in the teaching profession. Firstly, intensification leads towards reduced time for relaxation during the working day. Secondly, it

implies a lack of time to keep up with one's field and to retool one's skills. Thirdly, intensification is translated in a chronic and persistent sense of work overload that seemed to have escalated over time. "More and more has to be done; less and less time is available to do it." (Apple & Jungck, 1996, p.25). This overload reduces teacher's "areas of personal discretion, inhibits involvement in and control over longer-term planning, and fosters dependency on externally produced materials and expertise." (Hargreaves, 1992, p.88). Moreover, this implies a growing gap between the professional tasks of conception and planning on the one hand and execution on the other. The teacher's role is more and more reduced to the latter. Fourthly, intensification leads to reductions in the quality of time, as corners are being cut to save time (Hargreaves, 1992, p.88), "so that only what is 'essential' to the task immediately at hand is accomplished. (...) In the process, quality is sacrificed for quantity. Getting done is substituted for work well done" (Apple & Jungck, 1996, p.25). "And, as time itself becomes a scarce 'commodity', the risk of isolation grows, thereby both reducing the chances that interaction among participants will enable critiques and limiting the possibility that rethinking and peer teaching will naturally evolve. Collective skills are lost as 'management skills' are gained." (Apple & Jungck, 1996, p.25). A fifth set of effects of intensification entail the enhanced diversification of expertise and responsibility to cover personal shortages. This may lead to an excessive dependency on outside expertise and further reductions in the quality of service." (Hargreaves, 1992, p.89). Sixth, in order to cope with the reduced preparation time, simplified technological solutions to curriculum change are introduced. "Solutions to change and improvement focus on the simplified translation of externally imposed expertise rather than complex evolution of internally developed and shared improvements, along with the time needed for their creation." (Hargreaves, 1992, p.89). Finally, teachers appear to misinterpret intensification as a form of professionalization. By using technical criteria and tests, teachers feel more professional. Moreover, they seem to accept the longer hours and intensification of their work, as they feel more professional. "Intensification is voluntary supported by many teachers and misrecognized as professionalism." (Hargreaves, 1992, p.90; also see: Apple, 1986; Apple & Jungck, 1992 and 1996; Densmore, 1987; Hargreaves, 1992 and 1994; Troman & Woods, 2001).

1.2 De-professionalization of teachers' work

Intensification not only involves teachers' working conditions, but because of the dominance of the economic rationalism, another concept about the work and professionalism of teachers emerges. Being a teacher is reduced to the executing of tasks, which are centrally planned, systematized and standardized. Teachers' work is increasingly and exclusively conceived of in terms of technical and instrumental competencies. Moreover, the things, which make teaching a professional activity – namely, control over one's expertise and time- are increasingly being reduced.

More and more de-skilling is the case in the teaching profession: the skills needed to fulfil the teaching task properly and self-reflectively, decrease and even disappear when teachers don't have any opportunities to plan their tasks by themselves and even have control about it. The skills, developed

and built up during their career, seem to loose importance. The concept of teaching as an 'integrated whole activity' appears to be threatened. The only skills that seem to be important are the technical and the executive ones. "Concerns of care, connectedness nurturing, and fostering 'growth' (....) are devalued. In essence, they [the teachers] are no longer given credit for being skilled at all, as the very definition of what counts as a skill is further altered to include only that which is technical and based on a process 'which places emphasis on performance, monitoring and subject-centred instruction.'" (Apple & Jungck, 1996, p.26).

In other words, intensification implies teachers becoming de-professionalized. De-professionalization refers to the erosion of existing skills and bringing routine in the job. It also encompasses the loss of 'conceptual' responsibilities (goal setting and planning), while only the 'executive' exists and gains importance. The teacher's job just can't be thought of as being 'holistic' anymore, but is rather a sequence of separated tasks and assignments. The amount of professional tasks and bureaucratic assignments absorbs all teachers' time and energy. There is a significant lack of time for reflection, for moments of relaxation and recovery from stress. Teachers' autonomy, the experience of controlling the situation, decreases enormously. Teachers are thought of as being 'technicians', executers and no longer as 'professionals' (also see Apple, 1986; Apple & Jungck, 1992 and 1996; Densmore, 1987; Jeffrey and Woods, 1996). However, teachers frequently tend to accept this reduction to a technician as 'misrecognized professionalism' (see preceding; Apple, 1986; Densmore, 1987; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Hargreaves, 1992 and 1994).

1.3 Empirical evidence and steps to refinements

Using the intensification thesis, Apple (1986) and others have tried to systematically describe and clarify the changes in teachers' work. Several studies, e.g. in the U.S.A., Canada, Tasmania (Australia) and England showed empirical evidence for the intensification thesis (Apple, 1986; Apple & Jungck, 1992 and 1996; Hargreaves, 1992 and 1994; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Troman, 1996 and 1997; Troman & Woods, 2000 and 200; and Woods 1999): the teachers experienced a negative impact of the growing amount of changes they are facing. Merson (2000) summarizes the contribution of the intensification thesis as follows: "Interpretations of intensification vary with author but common themes emerge: more of the teacher's time devoted to the task of teaching, the scope of administrative duties extending, and less time for collegial relations, relaxation and private life." (Merson, 2000, p. 160).

However, most authors formulated some refinements and clarifications to this intensification thesis (Hargreaves, 1992 and 1994; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Troman, 1996 and 1997; Troman & Woods, 2000 and 2001; Woods 1999). Woods (1999) stated that intensification is "not a single, all-inclusive, deterministic development" (Woods, 1999, p.117). Hargreaves (1992 and 1994) also shares this opinion: his research on intensification does "raise doubts about its scope and singularity as an explanation of changes in teachers' work, suggesting that further inquiry is needed in which other

theories and perspectives in addition to those concerned with the nature of the labor process may need to be acknowledged as important for our understanding." (Hargreaves, 1992, p.105). Hence, the intensification thesis does not seem to offer an all-encompassing explanation for the changes in teachers' working conditions, yet it shows that the changes are significant and far-reaching.

Several studies, however, show the need to refine the 'original' intensification thesis. Basically, two tendencies can be distinguished. First, it was argued that the intensification impact is not as direct and automatic as supposed; it is mediated through several processes. Secondly, the studies indicate that the impact of intensification also has to be differentiated among teachers: the impact is not the same for all teachers. Both modifications are being discussed in the next paragraph of our paper.

2 The intensification thesis modified

Taking up the demands for modification of the intensification thesis, we link it to research on teachers' work lives and professional development. We conceive of **professional development** as a complex and life-long learning process throughout the career of teachers and principals. This learning process is based on specific career experiences and takes places in a permanent interaction between the individual and the context (Kelchtermans, 1993 and 1999; Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000 and 2001). We take a constructivist, contextualised and interactionistic stance towards professional development.

Using this definition of professional development, we argue for two major modifications to the intensification thesis. The impact of intensification is both mediated and differentiated.

2.1 Modification 1: The intensification impact is mediated

We conceive of professional development as a contextualised and interactive process between the individual teacher and the context. This context is to be understood as multi-levelled. For example, the socio-cultural level (characterized by uncertainty and lack of conceptual as well as normative clarity; the ideology), the macro policy level (the new rules and demands by the government towards schools and teachers), the context of the school as an organization, the contacts with colleague-teachers, parents, the union, ...

Intensification impact is never a simple one-way traffic from the government/ policy towards teachers. Below we will argue the importance of following mediating factors in this relation between policy manners and individual teachers. First, we discuss the impact of the policy ideology (2.1.1). Secondly, teachers' beliefs and interpretations of their experiences –more specifically the demands and expectations with which they are confronted- can play an important 'mediating role' in the impact of intensification on teachers (2.1.2). Finally, as already outlined in our definition of professional development, the local school context plays a significant part in the relation between external demands and teacher (2.1.3).

2.1.1 The impact of policy ideology

Policy ideology has an important impact on teachers (Apple, 1986; Apple & Jungck, 1992 and 1996). As Acker (1999) concludes: "the work of teaching is vulnerable to restructuring, subject to new political and economic forces, and affected by postmodernity (...)" (Acker, 1999, p.23).

In her recent study on the British educational policy, Helsby (1999) describes the strong influence of policy arrangements on developments at the school level. However, in discussing the relation between government ('the state') and education, Helsby (1999) continuously stresses the fact that the government's impact on teachers cannot be thought of as completely forcing. The relation between educational change and the dominant ideology is complex. The educational system is evidently influenced by the ideology, but this influence is not overwhelming. This is attributed to the permanent possibility of negotiation and interpretation: "at each stage in the complex process of policy development and implementation, the idealized prescriptions of the new capitalism are contested, mediated and transformed through a series of interpretations, choices and decisions taken at different levels within individual nation states and their national educational systems." (Helsby, 1999, p.29)[1]. This does not mean that any correspondence between education and state[2] would be non-existent. However, the extent in which we can observe a relation depends on the agency of groups of decision makers (Helsby, 1999). Those groups not only exist of policy makers on governmental level, but also principals, teachers, parents, school board, umbrella organisations[3] and unions.

To sum up, it seems crucial to take into account the complex interaction between structure and agency within the specific social and political context, and the current ideology in order to understand the impact of central government (and other policy groups) and the ideological discourse on teachers' thinking and practice.

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[1] Elsewhere, Helsby argues: "Thus, it would seem overall that, despite claims to the contrary, education is not directly or inevitably influenced by changing employment requirements and that any 'correspondence' between education, and work practices is far from automatic." (Helsby, 1999, p.19).

[2] Helsby (1999) argues that 'THE state' doesn't exist. The state just isn't a single entity. Moreover, within and between these apparatuses a lot of tension takes place. In addition, one always has to take into account the particular historical and social cultural contexts of individual states. In this way teachers' place and role within the state system always remains open for contestation and change. Helsby further argues that the educational policymaking is not a simple process, no "one-off event that happens in a particular place or time." (Helsby, 1999, p.23). Overall, it is a cyclic and iterative process, taking place in different contexts. Finally, policy is not only influenced by different interest groups, but also by personal preferences, political convictions and the relative strength of central persons within the educational as well the broader state apparatus.

[3] We conceive of umbrella organisations as networks of school boards represented by umbrella organizations.

2.1.2 The individual teacher mediates

In this part, we focus on the individual teacher as mediating the intensification impact. First, we argue that teachers still have some degrees of freedom to cope with changes (2.1.2.1). Secondly, teachers always filter demands and changes through their own opinions, beliefs, ... (2.1.2.2). Finally, we highlight teachers' own initiatives to change (2.1.2.3).

2.1.2.1 Teachers' degrees of freedom

Helsby (1999) argued that the broader socio-historical and economic context plays a significant role in the intensification impact on the teachers' job. However, at the same time, an important role is reserved to the agency of the teachers. "Both structural and cultural changes to schooling will do little to improve schooling unless they take into account the importance of the active agency of teachers in constructing the reality of educational practice on a day-to-day basis in their schools and in their classrooms." (Helsby, 1999, p.30). As a consequence, teachers still have a degree of freedom to decide whether or not they respond to those imposed changes. Moreover, the educational reality is given form by the multiple decisions teachers have to make in their daily life, rather than by the issues imposed from 'above' or 'outside' (also see Kelchtermans, 1996). "Whilst teachers are constrained to varying degrees by external imperatives, the inevitability of their relative autonomy means that they retain the capacity to make an infinite number of (often minor) choices which, cumulatively, shape the outcomes of any educational reform initiatives and may well subvert the intentions of state policy-makers." (Helsby, 1999, p. 30- 31). However, their autonomy and freedom are not unlimited since teachers will always have to deal with their context containing a range of external structural and cultural factors.

2.1.2.2 The teachers filtering the influences

It would be unrealistic to suppose that teachers accept, undergo, cope with changes without any interpretation, or without any reflection. Teachers filter the changes in working conditions through their personal ideologies and perspectives (Kelchtermans, 1994, 1996 and 1999; see also Troman, 1997 and 2000; Troman & Woods, 2001). This 'filtering' of experiences (in other words: giving meaning to these experiences) takes place through the 'personal interpretive framework', as Kelchtermans conceptualised it. This is a set of cognitions that operates as a lens through which teachers perceive their job situation, give meaning to it and act in it (Kelchtermans, 1993 and 1994). Within this framework two important and interwoven domains were identified. First, there are the teacher's conceptions about him/herself as a teacher: *the professional self*. Through analysis of the career stories Kelchtermans (1993) distinguished five components in this professional self: the self image (descriptive component: who am I as a teacher?), the self esteem (the evaluative component: how well I am doing my job as a teacher?), the job motivation (the conative component: what motivates me to become a teacher, to be a teacher and to remain one?), the task perception (the normative

component: what do I consider to be my task as a teacher? What should I do in order to be a proper teacher?) and the future perspective (prospective component: how do I look at the years to come in my career and how do I feel about it?). The second component is the *subjective educational theory:* the personal system of knowledge and beliefs on teaching. The subjective educational theory thus contains the teacher's practical knowledge, that provides the personal answer to the questions "how should I deal with a specific situation in my job?" and "why do I think this is the best way to do so?".

The confrontation between the professional self and the subjective educational theory, as developed during teacher career on the one hand and the experience of external demands and expectations on the other, often leads to tensions, doubts, and possibly revisions of the personal interpretative framework (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). The personal interpretive framework functions as a lens through which all changes, demands and expectations are perceived, interpreted and valued/ evaluated. In other words, the teachers' personal beliefs mediate the impact of the things going on in their jobs. Kelchtermans (1999) argues that policy arrangements (like formal job descriptions) only will have impact on the actual practice as far as this is interpreted and translated to professional self and practice. Hence, the professional self can be thought of as the subjective and to a large degree individual interpretation of those external identity descriptions (Kelchtermans, 1996).

Several studies indicated that teachers hold a specific criterion in the filtering of changes and demands: what do these changes mean for one's own practice (Kelchtermans, 1996). More specifically, the changes must have a meaningful impact on the pupils: their learning process, results and well-being. The relation with the pupils has to be safeguarded. Teachers are more willing to accept some changes and demands when they expect that these will positively affect the pupils.

2.1.2.3 Teachers' initiatives to change

Up to here, changes seem predominantly originating from outside the individual teacher; they are imposed and externally formulated. This, however, is not always the case. Smylie (1999) and Hargreaves (1992 and 1994) argue that teachers are not only subjected to changes, but also take initiatives for changes themselves. The experience of intensification therefore isn't always exclusively induced by externally imposed expectations: several of these expectations and demands seem to come from the teachers themselves. Teachers put pressures on themselves by stubbornly keeping and merciless striving to reach self-formulated standards of pedagogical perfection. Hence, the pressure is not only created from 'outside', but also from 'inside'. "They did not appear to need direction or pressure from above to motivate them in their quest. They drove themselves quite hard enough." (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 94) This commitment is described –following Nias (1989)- as "professional and vocational commitments, commitments that are grounded in the kinds of meanings and purposes that teachers attach to their work." (Hargreaves, 1992, p.95). Furthermore, Hargreaves (1992 and 1994) observed that those self-formulated standards and commitments do not disappear or even decrease when experiencing intensification. Teachers keep holding to their standards. Not all

tendencies towards professionalism are a myth, says Hargreaves (1992 and 1994). "In these patterns of commitment and care are to be found important modifications to the intensification thesis. (...) In certain respects, intensification can be an important feature of the work of the teachers we studied, but this does not mean that all that passes for professionalism is but a ruse or a myth. Teachers' commitments and skills cannot be explained away quite that easily." (Hargreaves, 1992, p.95).

2.1.3 The mediating role of the context

As we pointed out in the definition of professional development, the context in which teachers work also has an important impact on their professional development. More specifically, the individual teachers' interaction with the specific context makes professional development a unique process. In thinking about the intensification impact on teachers' thinking and practice, we thus can't ignore the school context. In this part we will focus on the structural and cultural characteristics of the school as organisation, and how they mediate possibly intensifying changes.

However, before focussing on the impact of the local school context, we cannot ignore Acker's (1999) warning to be careful in generalizing 'theories' from one context to another. She questions the forcing impact of ideology in education. We cannot simply generalize tendencies encountered in other sectors (such as industry) to the context of education. In her study, she explicitly questions this evident similarity: "The question for our purposes is whether teachers experience similar changes in their own work. There are certainly some trends in that direction. (...) Nevertheless we cannot easily see teachers' work as simply mirroring these trends." (Acker, 1999, p.21).

Following Acker's warning, we have to explicitly raise the question whether these trends are also the case in Flanders and whether this ideology (and its consequences) is also dominant in Flanders. Indeed, we just cannot generalize education and the effects of policy in U.S., Great Britain, Canada or Tasmania (Australia) to Flanders. Acker (1999) formulates it as follows: "Aspects of teaching in one society may not duplicate those in another (...), and even in the same society, persons from different gender, religious and ethnic groups may hold quite different ideas about teaching." (Acker, 1999, p.23).

These 'warnings' are in line with our 'contextualised' concept of professional development. Teachers' thinking and practice take place in the continuing interaction between the individual teacher and his/her context. This context entails cultural and structural characteristics of the school, its local socio-cultural context, the educational policy context and the features of society. A lot of actors participate in this (different levels of) colleagues, principal, pupils, school board members, unions, policymakers, members of umbrella organisations, ... Together, they constitute the working conditions in which teachers operate. As outlined by Troman, this concept of professionalism is a "socially constructed, contextually variable and contested concept" (Troman, 1996, p.476 and Troman, 1997, p.87). The multiple 'parties' (e.g. teachers, principals, parents, the government, umbrella organisations, unions)

interpret and define what professional practice means to them. In this way, the professionalism defined by policy is expressed in expectations and demands towards teachers.

2.1.3.1 The existence of 'meso' level

External directions and policy arrangements are constantly mediated and canalised by human agency in schools and are to some extent incorporated in the specific practice. In other words, changes result from actions and choices at different moments in the process between formulating policy arrangements and the implementation in the classroom. Nevertheless, the way in which and the extent to which teachers effectively implement the policy strongly depends on the culture and structure of the local school as organisation. "The extent to which teachers adopt either an active or passive approach to educational policymaking is heavily influenced by the professional and work cultures within which they operate." (Helsby, 1999, p.28). The nature of teachers' actions thus is determined by the context in which they work. The context of the school as an organisation is what we refer to as the 'meso level'.

Likewise, other authors emphasize that the intensification impact is not a one-way traffic from government/ policy towards teachers (also see: Acker, 1999; Helsby, 1999; Kelchtermans, 1999; Rosenholtz, 1989; Smylie, 1999; Troman, 1997; Troman & Woods, 2001; Woods, 1999). Woods (1999) stresses the existence of an interspace between macro (policy) and micro (individual teacher) where one can have some space for negotiation and adaptation, namely the meso (the level of the school as organisation). Also Troman (1997) "has attempted to link the macro (via the meso) to the micro, showing how agency and structure are implicit in one another. Through their 'secondary adjustments' and contestations of the control of their work, the teachers created 'spaces' for manoeuvre." (Troman, 1997, p.250). This emphasis on the role of mediating elements on the meso level was one of the core ideas in the recent book edited by Vandenberghe & Huberman (1999) about stress and burnout. They demonstrated empirically as well as theoretically that the experience of stress results out of the interplay between factors (as well in the context, in the school as by teachers themselves) (see Kelchtermans, 1999; Leithwood, e.a., 1999; Smylie, 1999; Woods, 1999 in Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999).

For example: the principal can act as a buffer by postponing the implementation of a new curriculum part, as s/he feels that immediate implementation would lead to a problematic level of strain to the staff members, because of the increased workload. The impact of this policy arrangement –or more specifically, the meaning it gets- for the individual teacher will evidently differ from the situation in which the principal autonomously decides that all curriculum aspects have to be implemented immediately. In this way, the principal's attitude forms a bridge between the external demands and the teachers in the staff. Principals can also intervene when feeling that teachers are demanding too much of themselves by formulating high standards. Or on the contrary, by not formulating the limits of those standards, teachers can be completely overcharged, with the principal's 'permission'. Hence, the impact of the sources of intensification is not linear and automatically. The way in which 'schools'

cope with externally imposed changes and with the growing governmental control determines the meaning of policy for teachers' thinking and practice (also see Smylie, 1999). Troman and Woods (2001) clarify this idea using the example of trust in collaboration within one school team. The culture of collaboration seemed to be an important means to resist the paralysing impact of some external demands. In this school no one bowed for the rational technocracy, but everybody kept emphasizing the central role of the emotional experience of professional relationships. "They do not succumb to rational technocracy, but sustain a high level of emotional understanding about their professional relationships, both among themselves and with their pupils." (...) That cascading, bullying and deprofessionalization is not an inevitable consequence of the government reforms. There is much that can be done at agency and institutional levels to obviate these effects and to promote a more wholesome educational environment for teachers and pupils alike." (Troman & Woods, 2001, p. 135).

In this way, one could speak of 'mediating', taking space for manoeuvre. However, taking the 'space' as mentioned earlier isn't evident for teachers. Jeffery and Woods (1996) clearly show in their research about the British inspection (OFSTED) that the degree of negotiation in policy implementing can strongly be reduced by e.g. OFSTED-inspection: the control and standardization in the inspection procedures leave little space for teachers to negotiate. The inspection enters in the very heart of teachers' practices and builds a permanent surveillance. This arouses intense emotions in teachers' lives, as a reaction to the experienced attack on their feelings of professionalism. Similar observations were made by Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1998) in their evaluation of the effects of audits by the inspectorate in Flemish primary schools.

2.1.3.2 Micro-political processes

In his case study on intensification, Troman (1997) concluded that the labour theory does not offer a sufficient explanation for all manifestations of power and authority taking place in the school. He stressed the importance of micro-political processes as mediating factors at the meso level (Troman, 1997, p. 251-252). Micro-politics is a special feature of the working conditions, which can have a great role in the relation between external demands and teachers. These micro-political processes are constantly taking place when people work together in an organisation.

The micro-political perspective takes the idea of different interests among members of an organisation as the central focus in its understanding of organisational behaviour (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991 and 1997; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a and b). Micro-politics refer to the strategies and tactics used by individuals and groups in an organisation to further their interests (Hoyle, 1982). Power and influence, however, do not only refer to tension, conflict, struggle and rivalry, but also encompass collaboration or coalition building in order to achieve certain valued goals (Blase, 1991). As such the micro-political perspective deals with a natural phenomenon in the functioning of organisations; micro-political processes simply occur in any organisation, in processes of collaboration as well as in resistance, and within the organisation as well as in the interactions with the external environment (Ball, 1994; Altrichter & Salzgeber, 2000). Central to its focus are the personal or collectively shared interpretations

of these political processes by the members of the organisation, and thus also their choices, values, interests, motives as well as their individual career stories, intertwined with the history of the school. Actions and thoughts of organisation members are to an important degree determined by interests. Taking up this central idea from the micro-political perspective, we linked it to the concept of "working conditions" (Kelchtermans, 1996). All teachers and principals hold beliefs about what entails good teaching and what conditions are necessary or desirable to perform their professional tasks properly. "Properly" here means both being "effective" (achieving the desired outcomes) and "satisfying" to the actor. These desirable or necessary working conditions operate as *professional interests* for the people involved. Through micro-political actions teachers and principals will strive to establish the desired working conditions, to safeguard them when they are threatened or to restore them if they have been removed. We thus understand *micro-political action* as *those actions that aim at establishing, safeguarding or restoring the desired working conditions*. This definition makes it possible to 'read' (interpret) specific behaviour in micro-political terms (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a and b; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1998).

The micro-political processes taking place in the school organisation can have an important mediating role in the intensification impact on teachers. Teachers (and principals) permanently strive to establish their interests, safeguard them and even restore them when lost. For example, one can have a strong organisational interest –e.g. autonomy, the feeling not being constantly observed or evaluated by colleagues and principal. One of the new requirements is a more frequent and intense collaboration between teachers. In this respect, the constant actions (strategies) to safeguard the interest of autonomy strongly influence the meaning and impact of that demand of collaboration. Let's have another –more general- illustration: the impact of the growing demands (coming from society as well from policy) may also be mediated by the veto the school team formulated towards the principal that they would not participate in a single change before receiving new materials. The impact of the changes in general is thus strongly mediated by the team's attitude.

In their turn these micro-political processes in the school can become more intense because of the growing demands and expectations. The contact with externally imposed arrangements can endanger and question the existing ideas of teachers about education and teaching. Clement (also see Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000 and 2001) studied the working conditions of autonomy and collegiality in Flemish primary schools. She found that a dynamic balance between autonomy and collegiality strongly determined the professional development that is taking place. We can therefore assume that because of the current changes and demands (e.g. more formal meetings, more activities that transcend the individual classes, peer observations, growing accountability, ...), the tuning and dynamics between autonomy and collegiality become under pressure. More and more, teachers experience that their feeling of autonomy –an important working condition- is under fire. Hence, the working conditions can –in their turn- be influenced by the external demands.

Of course those working conditions in a school can also be a source of intensification themselves (as a consequence of the influence of external demands). The professional relationships between teachers and between staff and with the principal can be hindered by policy arrangements. In this way, it is possible that by emphasizing the administrative tasks, teachers just don't have any time left to take a lunch break together with the colleagues. Teachers do not any longer meet in the staff room. Gitlin (2001) also stressed the idea of working conditions being a source of intensification. Moreover, he adds that this is a forgotten theme in the exploration of sources of intensification. He continues: "For too long now, the working conditions of teachers have been overlooked because it is assumed that teaching is a calling, a profession where one would work and overcome school-related obstacles regardless of their nature." (Gitlin, 2001, p.254-255).

To sum up, we argued that the impact of external demands is mediated through characteristics of the school organization. The intensification impact is not as linear as supposed. In other words, studying the implications of external demands on teachers, we always have to take into account the school organization and its mediating influence. As briefly illustrated, these characteristics can function as a kind of buffer between external demands and individual teacher but as such they can themselves become influenced and intensified. Cultural and structural characteristics of the school may thus in their turn operate as a source of intensification.

Summarizing

The intensification thesis is a powerful perspective to understand teachers' work. Nevertheless, we argued that many other processes are influencing the interplay between external demands and the individual teacher, like the ideology of policy, teacher's personal set of meanings and the organisational context in which teachers function. However, while 'listing' the mediating processes, it became clear that all these elements and processes, in their turn themselves may become a source of intensification: teachers impose new tasks to themselves, working conditions that intensify the teaching process, ...

2.2 Modification 2: the intensification impact is differentiated

Professional development is conceived of as an active and interactive process, in which not only the context has an important role, but the individual teacher with his/ her personal interpretive framework as well. The process of giving meaning to experiences is undoubtedly an important mediating factor. Therefore, the specific intensification impact on teachers may differ significantly among teachers. The impact -and more specific the meaning of this impact- can be thought of as a result of the interaction between the individual teacher, the external demands and the context in which s/he works and lives. Moreover, teachers just do not merely undergo this impact but can also actively cope with it.

Reviewing the research literature, Acker (1999) also warns not to generalize the impact of policy to all teachers. "In trying to get to grips with the effects of the reforms, it is hard not to overgeneralize about 'teachers' and their response. (...) There is a range of possible responses, even among apparently similar teachers in the same school. Moreover, there are changes over time in such responses, paralleling changes in the politics and policies surrounding the reforms." (Acker, 1999, p.181). To illustrate: changes can yield a variety of reactions: some teachers react very strongly, others, although working in the same school, disregard the changes and a third group may try to implement the changes in their daily practice.

2.2.1 Teachers' agency and coping strategies

Too often literature on (teacher) stress pays little or no attention to the notion 'agency' of the individual, as Smylie argues: "So too much of the literature painted workers generally, and teachers specifically, as passive or reactive in their relationship to stress. Stress is something to be responded to, managed, coped with, avoided." (Smylie, 1999, p. 60). Nevertheless, not all teachers seem to be passive or reactive to stress inducing factors. After all, teachers do not react mechanically towards changes, but cope with them in a meaningful and often creative way (Woods, 1995; also see Troman, 1997, 2000 and 2001). Also, Acker (1999) stresses the importance of the agency and creativity of individual teachers in their personal coping with changes. "As interactionist theories in the sociology of education would predict, teachers respond to imposed reform creatively with a certain amount of agency (ability to take individual action), rather than mechanically and as victims of forces beyond their control. On the other hand, it is unlikely that there is simply an infinite scatter of possible responses, or that individuals can wish away the real constraints and consequences caused by the policies and other features of the British educational system." (Acker, 1999, p.181).

Coping strategies, more specifically the way in which teachers cope with intensification, are diverse and not easily to predict. Troman claims: "What many of the empirical studies of teachers' responses show is that the effect of restructuring and the responses of the teachers to the process are complex and contradictory. Teachers' reactions cannot simply be read of from official policy prescriptions." (Troman, 1997, p.49). Thus for, little research has been done in order to understand the teachers' coping strategies in the context of intensification.

In order to more deeply understand the meaning of the experience of intensification, it is necessary to describe and compare the different kinds of strategies teachers use. Again, this need fits in the contextualised and interactionistic concept of professional development since the strategies used by teachers -and their effectiveness- are influenced by the interaction between the individual teacher and his professional context. In his study about teachers' feelings of vulnerability, Blase (1988) situated different strategies on a continuum going from re-active to pro-active; and distinguished six of them: acquiescence, conformity, ingratiation, diplomacy, passive-aggressiveness and confrontation. Reactive strategies aim at maintaining the situation or protecting the teacher against changes or

external influences. Proactive strategies are directed towards changing the situation and influencing the conditions. In their research on beginning teachers, Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002a) argued that these different variants of micro-political action have to be understood as cyclical or iterative, rather than as positions on a continuum. Their analysis showed that a simple inventory, enlisting all micro-political strategies and actions is not relevant. Most probably it is even impossible, because almost every action can become micro-politically meaningful in a particular context (Blase, 1991, p.11; Altrichter & Salzgeber, 1996; Troman & Woods, 2001). As Blase argues, "micro-political significance may refer to the consequences or the meaning that actions have for others" (Blase, 1997, p.942). Whether and in what sense a particular action achieves micro-political significance is dependent on and must be understood from the specific meaningful interactions between the individual and the specific context.

2.2.2 Processes of interpretation

As outlined above, an important role should be given to teachers' agency. This agency is related to what these demands and expectations mean to the teachers: coping is based on the meaning teachers give to the changes. And hence, the way in which a teacher copes with intensification depends on the individual interpretation process. Referring to Woods et al. (1997), Troman says: "It has 'different implications for selve and role'. (...). So, although external and internal constraints were experienced by all, some viewed these more as challenges to be overcome, rather than sources of oppression." (Troman, 1997, p.235). For example, one can ask questions about the meaning of teachers' passive or resistant attitude. On the one side, it can be seen as obedience towards the externally imposed demands. With this 'deterministic explanation' the intensification thesis is being supported and the teacher's agency is neglected. But on the other side, one can think of this obedient attitude as an intentional strategy to survive professionally. In this case, it has nothing to do with passivity, but with an 'active' and deliberate use of a coping strategy (also see Gitlin and Margonis, 1995), as explained above.

The specific meaning of the intensification impact to individual teachers differs according to their interpretation: on the way teachers perceive, interpret and value the changes they have to cope with. Thus, whether the experience of intensification leads to deprofessionalization depends on many factors. Easthope & Easthope (2000) found that the enhanced complexity of teachers' work in Tasmania could not exclusively be explained by the intensification thesis. One cannot pass the fact that teachers experienced a 'clash' between their own professional ideology (conceptions about teaching and being a teacher) and the ones defended by policymakers. This made teachers tend to stick to their own ideology, while at the same time, adopting the government's ideology. Teachers undertake action, corresponding with their own beliefs, and at the same time they are trying to respond to the demands of the government and to the translation of those demands by the school's management. This coping with and trying to hold to different beliefs about professionalism induces a lot of teacher stress. This consequently results in an increased workload on the one side and a more

embracing task perception on the other. Teachers have to be professional (corresponding to their own beliefs) as well as an efficient manager (corresponding with the policy ideology). They cannot go on accepting both these conceptions about professionalism on a long term, Easthope & Easthope (2000) claim.

Several studies indicate that teachers not merely adopt the government's definition of professionalism. Troman (1997) therefore talks about 'ambiguities of intensification'. He studied the impact of a series of policy arrangements on the organisation of and control over the daily work of British elementary teachers and found that the intensification thesis does not offer a sound explanation for the things going on in the teacher's job. This study showed that some elements of intensification indeed were apparent, while other data question the intensification thesis. Moreover, in some cases, one could observe an 'enhancement' of professionalism. Troman notices: "Intensification, therefore, was a feature of the Meadowfields' teachers' professional and personal lives[4]. Aspects of their work, which contributed to intensification, arose, in large part, from the administrative and managerial elements of their new roles. However, although there is evidence that the teachers' work has intensified in some respects, the data in many cases do not sit comfortably with elements of the intensification thesis, as expressed in the propositions. Many aspects of the teachers' work were, contrary to what the thesis predicts, producing enhanced professionalism. The thesis, therefore, is inadequate as a sole explanation of the teachers' responses to their changing work." (Troman, 1997, p.235).

Accordingly, the experience of intensification doesn't automatically and necessarily lead to deskilling and deprofessionalization (Troman, 1997; also see Hargreaves, 1992 and 1994; Woods, 1999). By introducing the new ideology and its new roles and responsibilities, the work pressure increased and one could speak of intensification: "More and more was taken on, while more and more was expected of the individual." (Troman, 1997, p.241). This experience of intensification does not mean a de-skilling for all teachers; teachers developed strategies to cope with this experience, since "while their work was being intensified, it was not wholly deskilled." (Troman, 1997, p.241). Illustrations are the strong experience of 'vocational commitment and service ethic', the facts that they learn a range of new skills. In other words, Troman found that "while the teachers were subjectively experiencing apparently worsening work conditions, they were also adopting new roles and responsibilities which required not only new levels of professional skill, but also enhanced professional commitment." (Troman, 1997, p.244). He concludes that there is more than intensification leading toward deskilling and deprofessionalization. "While some intensification is certainly taking place, it is accompanied by both deskilling and reskilling/ upskilling. The teachers, therefore, are simultaneously being professionalized and deprofessionalized (Woods et al., 1997). In other words, restructuring has set in train a process of reprofessionalization. Clearly then, labour process theory and the intensification thesis are inadequate in order to conceptualise the changes taking place to teacher professionalism at Meadowfields." (Troman, 1997, p. 249).

Again, teachers build their own perceptions, based on their own experiences. These perceptions make teachers act or react in order to cope with intensification. Relying on Troman's study (1997), teachers seem to use different strategies in coping with the different definitions of professionalism: teachers are obedient to (changes in) perceptions that are in line with the personal values; they reject others, which don't correspond. Teachers thus can be thought of as 'composite professionals', who adopt some ideas of the new educational dominance and reject others. They do not become complete 'technical professionals', as proposed in the new ideology, nor hold on in a rigid way to all their own perceptions. In other words, teachers' responses to the new demands are often ambivalent, complex and contradictory. In Troman's words: "rather the teachers are composite professionals in their responses to the new work, roles and identities which are opening up. They both comply with some of the educational reforms, which have restructured their work, yet resist others." (Troman, 1996, p. 485). Troman concludes, "Even in the face of the most stringent control of schoolwork human agency creatively shapes the teachers' responses." (Troman, 1996, p.485). Hence, teachers have a certain degree of freedom to cope actively and creatively with changes, as well in the working context as in their beliefs about professionalism. It seems evident that the specific impact of policy arrangements and ideologies depends on the process of giving meaning by the teachers.

In order to understand whether intensification induces professionalism for an individual teacher, we not only have to take into account the meaning s/he puts on it, but we also need to analyse the impact of the new management system and the specific translation into teachers' practice. In other words, we must take into account the specific context to understand the actual impact intensification has on teachers. In Acker's words: "Teacher workplace cultures influence the process of implementation and the extent to which teachers define innovations as deskilling or professionalizing their work." (Acker, 1999, p.23; also see Troman, 1997).

2.2.3 Emotional meanings

We cannot separate emotions from the teacher's self (Kelchtermans, 1996; Little, 1996; Nias, 1996 and 1999; Hargreaves, 1995 and 1998). As Hargreaves puts it: "emotions are dynamic parts of ourselves, and whether they are positive or negative, all organizations including schools are full of them." (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 559). When teachers talk about their job, they very often spontaneously mention feelings of happiness, pride, enthusiasm and commitment. However, they are not only experiencing positive emotions. Teaching also brings along feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness, frustration, anger and fear (Kelchtermans, 1994 and 1996).[5]

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[4] Meadowfield is the pseudonym for the school where Troman (1997) executed his intensive case study.

[5] The emotional dimension was one long heavily neglected dimension in research about teachers and their professional development. However, recently a growing interest in the emotions in teaching can be observed (Hargreaves, 1998; Little, 1996; Nias, 1996; Troman, 1997 and 2000).

Depending on the meaning external demands have for teachers (see preceding), their emotional impact will differ. Several studies indicated that emotions are intense when the professional self and the personal integrity as a teacher come into play, are contested or are questioned (also see Kelchtermans, 1996). When confronted with other definitions of professionalism (see preceding), one's own definition of 'being a good teacher' and the values one defends, can come at stake. This can lead towards a range of (intense) emotions (Kelchtermans, 1996). The close relation between the personal and professional self further makes teachers' reactions to the questioning of their 'good teaching' even stronger. In Troman's words: "in primary teaching, professional and personal identity intermingle, each feeding into the other." (Troman, 1997, p. 212). In this respect, Helsby (1999) states that intensification can have negative implications for the teachers' selves. For example, the inspectorate can question the moral goals the teacher values in his practice, which can imply an attack on the teacher's self (also see Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Nias, 1996 and 1999; Troman, 1997; Troman & Woods, 2001). However, we have to be careful not to overemphasize the negative emotions when talking about intensification. Since the individual teacher (evidentially always in interaction with the context) interprets the external demands, it is possible that one 'feels good' when confronted with these arrangements. For example, this may be the case when one is experiencing an enhancement of their professionalism (see above).

In this way, we can argue that the emotional aspects are indicators of the teachers' interpretation of intensification. Teachers' emotional reactions towards the inspectorate (as a possible source of intensification) are a proper illustration of the possible impact this inspectorate has on teachers' thinking about themselves and about teaching. In their study about the British OFSTED-inspection Jeffrey and Woods (1996) perfectly show the negative impact of this inspectorate, even for those teachers who weren't labelled as 'failing'. Their emotional reactions didn't appear to be irrational answers, but however, "are part of a process in which 'emotions are characterised by attitudes such as beliefs, judgements and desires, the contents of which are not natural, but are determined by the system of cultural belief, value and moral value of particular communities." (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996, p.327).

Summarizing

The effect of intensification on teachers differs strongly from person to person. The specific impact of an external demand depends to a large degree on what this arrangement means to an individual teacher. The way in which teachers will then cope with this impact is a result of the process where they give a meaning to these demands. In all this we must always include the context in which teachers have to cope with the impact.

We can distinguish three –intertwined- 'domains' of possible impact on teachers. First of all, the impact can be situated on teachers' thinking, on their interpretations of themselves and teaching. In other words, we focus on the personal interpretive framework. Secondly, while discussing coping

strategies, it became clear that the impact is also situated on the level of 'practice', of coping with intensification. Finally, the experience of intensification is always accompanied by emotions since emotions are inseparable from being a teacher and can thus function as an indicator of the experienced impact. Referring to our argumentation, it is also evident that those three domains are interrelated; for example, a teacher can have a strong emotional reaction because s/he experiences an assault on his task perception when confronted with some new didactical principles. This experience of assault and the related emotional reaction directs the actions the teacher's actions.

2.3 Towards a modified intensification thesis

Many changes are taking place in the teaching profession. A possible explanation can be found in the labour theory, with the intensification thesis, stressing the growing demands and expectations on teachers that have a negative and inhibiting impact on them. However, the impact of these demands should not be thought of as linear. Using our concept of professional development as an active and complex learning process of an individual teacher in interaction with the specific context, we formulated two modifications of the original intensification thesis.

First, in the relation between external demands and individual teachers, there are many mediating processes. We emphasized the importance of the ideology of policy. Of crucial importance are the working conditions: the cultural and structural characteristics of the school, with special attention to micro-political processes. Another important aspect is the process of interpretation by the individual teachers: they interpret the changes happening in their professional life.
However, while 'listing' the mediating processes, we noticed that all these intervening elements, in their turn may become a source of intensification: teachers formulating targets to themselves, working conditions that intensify the teaching process, ... In other words, these mediating processes can intensify the process of teaching while interacting with the external demands and expectations. In so far, they also can be perceived/ interpreted of as sources of intensification.
Secondly, we argued that the impact on teachers is not as unequivocal as supposed. The impact is differentiated. In other words, the impact is not negative and inhibiting for all teachers in all situations, since in many cases, they act in a creative and pro-active way. Those ways of coping are also a product of the interaction of the individual teacher and the specific context.

Because we conceive of 'intensification' in a broader and more refined way than the original intensification thesis, it could be better to use another –temporary- concept: **'the experience of intensifying working conditions'**. By using the term 'working conditions', we emphasize the fact that the experience of intensification occurs in interaction with the mediating, intervening processes that in their turn can also become a source of intensification. The concept 'experience' helps us to stress the fact that intensification doesn't have the same impact on all teachers; it is the individual experience that counts. Finally, we consciously add 'intensifying' since not one single event would induce the experience of intensification, but it has to be considered as a process taking place over time.

This leads us towards a more refined conceptual framework, which helps us to study professional development at the beginning of the 21st century.

3 Preliminary findings from pilot study

In this part, we hold on by our specific research project. First, we will formulate our research questions (3.1). Then, we focus on the research design and methodology (3.2). Finally, we offer our preliminary findings (3.3).

3.1 Research questions

In this project the central question is whether and in what way teachers in Flemish primary schools experience intensifying working conditions. Using the intensification thesis and the related 'refinements' we can rephrase this interest in three –intertwined- research questions.

(1) Which ***forms*** of intensifying working conditions can be found in the actual primary education in Flanders?
(2) In second instance, we focus on the ***impact*** of the growing demands and expectations on teachers. In this respect, we can distinguish three –evidently inseparable- 'domains' of impact: the impact on teachers' thinking (personal interpretative framework), feeling (emotional reactions) and practice (coping strategies).
(3) Finally, we focus on the ***mediating elements*** in this process and more specifically, on the characteristics of (and processes taking place in) the school organization as a mediating element. However, we will study whether or not the working conditions on their turn could be influenced by the intensifying working conditions.

3.2 Research design and methodology

In order to do justice to the complexity and particularity of teachers' experiences of intensifying working conditions, we have to respect the following principles. The first principle is the need to contextualize the phenomenon of intensification since theoretical insights gained in one context are not necessarily the case in another. For example, we can't merely suppose that the dominant ideology in Great Britain is also dominant in Flanders. Therefore, we have to question whether we could encounter similar sources of the experience of intensifying working conditions in Flanders. Secondly, questioning the way teachers in which deal with 'the experience of intensifying working conditions', urges us to focus on the meaning teachers give to this experience. In this respect, a qualitative-interpretive methodology is required. Merriam argues: "Qualitative researchers are *interested in the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world." (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). In this way we pay attention to the

particular meaning of a teacher and to the way in which this experience receives a place in their (professional) story (also see Kelchtermans, 1993). Thirdly, we can't ignore the interactionistic stance in order to value the context in which teachers' work. Finally, the experience of intensifying working conditions is not related to one single moment, but entails a whole process.

In order to answer our research questions and to respect those principles, we use a multiple case study design. This method is suitable "to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of those involved. The interest is in a process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation." (Merriam, 1998, p.19). In our research we opt for this multiple case study design, with a one school as research unit. By using multiple case studies, we could add a comparative dimension in our study (namely: comparing different contexts). Miles and Huberman point out: "by looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying *how* and *where*, and if possible, *why* it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings." (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 29).

In February 2001 we conducted a **pilot study** in a Flemish primary school[6]. This study contained semi-structured interviews with 5 respondents: the principal, a teacher with a part-time policy support time, and three classroom teachers. All 5 interviewees had at least 10 years of teaching experience. Next to the interviews, the researcher participated in staff room conversations and informal talks with the school team members.

Data analysis followed data collection. Fist, we did a vertical or within-case analysis on the data of every respondent (Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1989). This analysis should be understood as a chain of interpretive transformations of the data, and resulted in a synthesis text, that was fed back to the respondent for communicative validation during the final interview. The vertical analysis concentrated on the internal coherence and consistency of the individual story. All synthesis texts had a common structure, which was the basis for the second comparative analysis. In this horizontal analysis, the stories were compared systematically, looking for communities, remarkable differences, recurring patterns.

[6] We selected this school since they had been audited in November 2000 by the inspectorate. Our first focus was the way teachers currently experienced their job and whether changes have taken place. Additionally, we explored their feelings about the inspectorate and the full inspection report.

3.3 Preliminary findings

In this part, we present some general findings of our pilot case study. Although data analysis is still in progress, we wanted to check whether our conceptual modifications to the original intensification thesis prove justified when applied empirically. We highlight three common themes, which we found in each interview. First, the hardworking team members stimulate each other to respond to the new demands, while the principal does not structure those demands. Secondly, it was found that teachers use the advantages for the children as the crucial criterion to decide whether or not a demand is valuable. Finally, although all respondents coped in another way, a common issue was a balance between professional and personal life, without doing any harm to the pupils.

Hardworking team stimulates but is not buffered

The first finding is that the team consists of hardworking teachers who constantly stimulate each other to respond to the growing demands and innovations. This happens without any structuring by the principal. The team members are pervasively motivated to grow in their teaching practice. As Kathleen points out: *"When you don't enjoy working hard, you won't stay in our school for years."* The teachers are willing to adapt their practice to new trends in order to help the children. For example, all teachers start implementing the popular methods in their daily practice. They are very eager to know about new ideas and new methods. As Walter points out: *"In this school everybody is extremely motivated (...) even worse, they overdo things. Everything has to be done immediately. They don't allow themselves to take time. In this team, you have to be careful with innovations. Since most teachers are convinced that they are working too little. (...) We always want to do everything as perfect as possible. And we think that we are great when implementing new methods."*

Teachers of the same grade collaborate intensively. They stimulate and motivate each other by sharing and constantly developing new materials, contents and vision. In other words, they incite each other to work and grow. In Kim's words *"When you see your colleagues working in their classes, you ask them: 'how do you handle this?' 'Oh, in that way! I'm going to try it too in that way.' Or, I suddenly have some ideas. (...) I guess, if you don't have any colleagues of the same grade, it would be far more difficult and you would have to work far more slowly. Now, it is like 'Oh, she made a game for maths; let's try it for environmental studies. Not because you want to surpass the others, but just because you accept each other as equal partners."*

The principal also shares this attitude of responding quickly to changes, innovations, and other demands. *"He knows a lot about innovations. He enjoys it to find out more about them. And he talks about in the team."* (Kim). However, the teachers don't feel like being forced to change. They can make their own choices whether or not to start implementing new ideas and demands. They feel respected by the principal and get the opportunity to work and decide fairly autonomously without the principal's permission. Hence, the principal wants to give the teachers time to implement changes and argues that teachers can start implementing it whenever they think they are ready. Kathleen clarifies: *"He often says 'you don't have to run'. On the one side he asks you to keep things up to date, to go*

on, 'but you do not have to exaggerate, try to find a balance.' But he wants us to know about the new things, he wants us to carry on (...) he wants us to at least try it, without having to be afraid that he would say 'if you don't do it, then I don't like it'. (...) We may take the time for it. However, many of us are worried 'it is a good thing and we have to try it.' And that is what creates our pressure." This implies that everybody is responding individually (or by grade) without any co-ordination, without any line or structure in the responses. As Kim points out: *"The new ideas or things that must take place, are fired off at us but they are not clearly structured. It is not decided: 'we are going to plan this in this way on this period. Everybody works in this or that way'. Hence, some teachers are caught immediately, and others wait. And then, after a while, you don't have a clear line anymore. And I think sometimes, too little is imposed from above. (...) The structure isn't always provided about 'what will we do about it?' And hence, everybody just does it in his own way. And that often leads to problems. But no big problems."* This way, while experiencing a lot of autonomy and freedom in their daily practice, teachers feel that the principal is not limiting the demands. All new things just come to them, without any buffering by the principal. This leads sometimes to burdens of displeasure, as Kim accentuates. *"And afterwards, we are blamed like: 'the principal announces some new method and you start working with it, while you don't have to.' And then, the misunderstandings are coming up. (...) Then, some people are labelled as being 'outstripping'. Because those say: 'yes, we enjoy it to try out new things.' And then, others react with 'they are doing it again'. (...) It sometimes is very difficult, because the principal doesn't structure well."*

To sum up, in this part is shown that the specific cultural and structural characteristics play an important mediating role in the relation between the external demands (translated by the principal) and the individual teachers. An important feature of this school culture is the teachers' enthusiasm and willingness to experiment with new things. However, nowadays plenty of demands are fired at the school and the principal doesn't buffer those demands. He communicates those to the teachers and offers them the time and space to implement. This lack of structuring could lead to tensions between teachers since they do not work systematically on the innovation. However, this doesn't lead to any problems in the team, because the teachers have the feeling they can freely talk about their worries and problems. Moreover, this lack of structuring by the principal is compensated in several ways: by the intense collaboration with colleagues of the same grade, by themselves (their motivation) and by the permanent evaluation of the changes and demands coming up to them. In this evaluation, the pupils are used as a criterion.

Pupils as barometers to evaluate a change

A second pattern in the results of this pilot study is the teachers' permanent evaluation of external demands in which the benefits for the pupils as the crucial criterion. The respondents evaluate most of the demands, as very interesting and useful. They are convinced of the importance of those demands and expectations, e.g. working in corners, contract work, attention to the socio-emotional aspects of being a child. As Kim says: *"It is more than just teaching. I have the teaching job, but I have to educate too."* She wants to respond to every problem of every child. *"I want to help those*

children. For example, I have a child with a specific problem in my class. I want to know more about it. I have to find out. That is very enriching. I just want to do that. But yes, one can think of it as being overcharged." Accepting the demands as very useful and important makes the teaching job very hard, but it is more or less perceived as a personal choice. As Chris says: *"I think the problem is situated by ourselves: we know it is necessary and there are plenty of things which are useful and we want to do it all. Even when we have little time."*

Although they are convinced of the importance of many changes, the teachers explicitly ask for more time to realise everything. As Kathleen formulates it: *"I think those are good ideas, coming from 'higher up'. However, one has to give teachers the time to implement it slowly. And for doing so, we will need a couple of years. I think that they are all good ideas, but it may not be too drastic to do it all at once."*

An important criterion to assess the value of an innovation is the benefits for the pupils. For example when Chris and Kim experience that the children enjoy working in corners, they are strongly motivated to continue. However, demands without any clear and direct advantage for the pupils are much more difficult to carry out. Kathleen does not see any surplus value in the formal analyses of pupils' faults on tests. *"I think it is ridiculous to do all that paperwork and making lists. I think it is awful. (...) One should do that. But I don't. (...) Personally, I think it is useless because I correct the tests my way. I don't see the use of it; I think I can help the children as well in my manner as by those lists. I think it is a loss of time. At that moment, I' d better use my time for making a new maths lesson."* Chris feels the same about the growing paperwork: *"We often complain about the fact that you can spend less time with the children. Since we have more work to do next to the teaching. Thus, we feel pity not being able to work with the kids. Since that is often more useful. When I prepare a working sheet for a kid having difficulties on one subject, it is often more useful than completing a dossier."*

Teachers constantly evaluate the additional demands. They use two criteria: the benefit for the pupils and how they personally feel about it. In Kim's words: *"One has to try them out and one does not always feel comfortable with them. And one has to bend it to one's own will because one has to enjoy oneself. Without aggrieving the children. (...) A lot of things are coming upon us. We have to try them out, and you finally will conclude: 'I'm not going to do that anymore because we didn't reach a thing. It didn't have any advantage for the kids.' (...) Hence, one has to find out everything and adapt it a little and constantly reflecting on everything. And that is what one has to do every day, every year. (...) Surely, there are some things that one adapts and see 'that is all right now, I can keep it this way for a while.' And then, new curricula are offered, and one has to start over again. There is always something to do."* This is in line with the idea all the respondents explicitly mention: one has to make it interesting to oneself. In this pilot study, the respondents explicitly want to grow in their profession. Chris clarifies: *"I want to make it pleasant and interesting for myself. Otherwise, it would be dull. One has to look for new challenges."*

Another issue in the evaluating of new demands is the individual teacher's task perception. Kathleen is very suspicious about working with computers in the classroom. She does not want to work with those computers since she fears that her relation with the kids will suffer from it. Teaching for her consists of a constant interaction between teacher and pupil. And this aspect will be gone when using computers in teaching. *"Where will be my normal teaching job? (...) Oh, I just don't want that to happen. Then, the pleasure is gone. I won't have any contact with my kids; I will loose the game of question and response. (...) Where will be the social aspect in teaching? Learning to discuss, to tell to and listen to each other? (...) I just enjoy it so much to sit in the group and discuss with the kids. That's teaching. That is what I like about our job. When they take that away, then, it is gone."*

Summarizing, teacher filter the demands through their personal beliefs, opinions, thoughts, ... In other words, they filter the demands through their personal interpretive framework (Kelchtermans, 1993). This filtering and interpretation mediate the impact of demands: when teachers perceive a change as being valuable for the children, they are more willing to work on it, rather than when they judge the change as not useful. Hence, the subjective educational theory mediates the impact. As became clear in Kathleen's story, the personal self (more specific: the task perception) is also mediating: the relation with the pupils is an important part in teaching. However, she fears that this will disappear when implementing ICT. Thus the meaning she gives to ICT will influence the impact on her teaching practice and the way in which she will cope with it. Finally, here too, it is shown that the pressure to change is not only coming from outside, but also from the teachers themselves: they want to learn more about plenty of things in order to help the children.

Coping: keeping it human, without doing harm to the children

The third pattern concerned the coping strategies teachers in the pilot study used. Analysing the different interviews, it is obvious that the teachers cope in different ways. However, those different coping strategies have one issue in common: each teacher wants to combine the personal and professional life, without doing any harm to the pupils.

We illustrate it with Kim's story. She feels like a good teacher when she can respond to most of the changes. Additionally, she wants to respond perfectly to these demands, because she perceives them as very valuable. She almost lives for her classroom teaching and nearly 'works nights and days'. For example, when she watches television at 10 pm, she feels guilty not to be working for school. However, she felt it was impossible to respond to all things with which she is confronted in a perfect way. Additionally, she wanted her household to be perfect: since she lives alone, she has to take care of everything herself. Hence, she was not able anymore to combine all these tasks when she got the chance to reduce her contract to a 80 % job. She took this opportunity and by doing this, she now feels like having everything under control again. She explains her choice: *"because of the long hours I work at home. (...) I live alone. People think that one always has the time for everything when living alone. But one wants to build social relations too and I have a social and family life too; even when living alone. Plus I have to take care of everything on my own. I want everything to be*

perfect: my house, my garden, and my car. And I want to have a good time with my family, help them. (...) I want to do everything perfectly. And sometimes, this is impossible. And then, I am somehow frustrated. Since I want to respond to every problem of every child. And I don't succeed always. (...) I think they [the demands] are valuable. That's why I chose to work part time. Because all the things I am doing extra, I think they are useful and interesting. But I can't do them all when working full time. Then one has to slow down somewhere. (...)"I do not understand how colleagues working full time can manage everything. They have to say 'I stop here. Here is the limit.' They have to! It can't be in another way. Working full time again, I just would not hold on."

The combination with the personal life is an important aspect in the coping mechanisms. This was the case for every teacher. For example, for Chris it is very difficult to combine her family life (with two little kids) and working full time. Especially since she was used to work constantly for school before she had children. Hence, now she has to divide her time and energy between her own children and her teaching job. However, she can handle it since she explicitly formulates priorities, reserving the holidays for work. *"The things which we think are the most useful, we do them first. And when something is not done, I do it afterwards."*

To sum up, the way in which teachers cope with the (external as well internal) demands is influenced by several processes. Above we already pointed out that the way in which teachers interpret the demands affects the way in which teachers cope with them. Moreover, the specific impact is also influenced by the structural and cultural characteristics of the specific school. In this part, we add another aspect affecting the coping strategies: the balance between the professional and the personal life. In this study, it was clear that the respondents want to invest in the school, even after school time, but they also want to have some time for themselves and for their family. Although this was the common pattern, the specific coping strategies differ: from choosing to work part time to formulating priorities.

4 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to deepen our understanding of the changes that are taking place in teachers' work. We used the 'original' intensification thesis (Apple, 1986) as a starting point. In this thesis the negative impact of external demands and expectations on teachers is stressed. Although several studies revealed empirical evidence, they also formulated some refinements and clarifications. Briefly summarized, two modifications are mentioned: the intensification impact is mediated and differentiated. Using the definition of professional development as a complex and life-long learning process, we explored and argued for those modifications. To make clear that we conceive of 'intensification' in a broader and more refined way than the original intensification thesis, we proposed the term 'the experience of intensifying working conditions'. This conceptual framework proves to be sufficient refined/ sophisticated to grasp nowadays teachers' work lives and to provide elements for an empirically grounded theory on professional development.

5 Literature

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